



## Exchange Reports

### University of Groningen

### Groningen, Netherlands

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#### Teaching and Learning Environment

- You take 5 courses over 2 blocks in the fall semester - most people split it into 3 courses in block 1 and 2 courses in block 2. Courses are taught in English, and since the school is a major international institution, professors have a strong command with the language, so there's no concern about not understanding your professors. I would say that the course selection is pretty limited, especially in the second block. Groningen's semester runs into January, so for block 2, students are limited to courses where there is no mandatory in-class element or exam during the month of January. Most courses offered in block 2 either had pre-requisites that exchange students didn't possess, or had final exams in January, so there was only a small number of classes we could choose from.  
Most classes had a 100% final at the end of the block, but some had in-class elements as well such as a small written assignment or an oral presentation. Style of instruction is very similar to Queen's - lectures by the prof with participation and active engagement from the class.
- We took 5 courses throughout our time in Groningen. There are 2 blocks - the first runs from September until mid-November. The second runs from mid-November until end of January. For this reason, we could only take paper-based courses in the second block (because we were back in Canada during the exam period).  
There were a number of classes available in the first block. Two were assignment-based and one was a 100% exam (closed book, but totally manageable). There were very limited options in the second block since we could only take paper-based courses. Classes were not mandatory, and the professors were engaging - overall I enjoyed the courses I took.

- I took 5 courses in total, 4 in the first block (September to late October) and 1 in the second block (November-December). The first block selection is wide-ranging and easy to fit into a schedule that allows for more free time. The second block has few choices because you need to find course with no mandatory participation or a final exam (would send in a paper online) since you will have to leave in December and their second block goes until February. Teaching style is lecture based with some slides, mostly 100% final. Assessment methods are either exam, take-home exam, or a paper. The courses weren't particularly hard but there are some international law master courses which are difficult.
- I took a total of five courses. Three in first block and two in second block. The course selection was great! I was able to take a variety of courses. I took Dutch Law in a Comparative Perspective, Comparative Criminal Law, Energy Law and Policy, International Health Law, and Private International Comparative Law. The quality of instruction was fantastic. Overall, the professors were engaging and excited to teach exchange students. The assessment methods were all final based, whether that was a paper or an exam. Some courses said that there were participation marks, but I never found that professors actually considered participation in the final grade. The grading scale is out of 10, with a 5.5 being a passing grade. Most students get a 6 or a 7. I did find it frustrating that their system is based on that many students will not pass their first try at the final, with the expectation that they can re-take the final at a later date. However, exchange students cannot re-take an exam in January/February, as they will be back in their home country. There was never any communication with exchange students about what to do if you fail your first exam and cannot retake it. I passed all my exams, so luckily, I did not have to deal with this.
- I took 5 classes-- 4 lectures and 1 seminar. Since I applied to their "shortened LLM" program, I selected the classes that were required for the first part of the LLM during my exchange. Therefore, I did not look at a lot of the other classes being offered.
- The professors I had were very knowledgeable about their respective areas of law. They encouraged and were excited to have participation from the class. All were very approachable and willing to answer any questions I had. Some professors incorporated more group discussion and group work, whereas others just lectured. All the lectures had a written exam (some also had small individual papers). The seminar was very much student led as we had to do presentations and discuss other students' presentations. It also had two individual papers and one group assignment.



1 - Submitted by Brennan C.

## Quality of Administrative Support for Students

- Administrative support in Groningen was not ideal. Instructions in the summer before enrolling in classes were unclear, and students were often told conflicting information or different instructions. The residence permit process was also extremely confusing, and the visa office took a very long time to answer emails or return phone calls. It is my understanding that the school does put together an information package about finding accommodation in Groningen, but I found housing without the school's assistance.
- I found that administrative staff were responsive to my emails and quite friendly, though I never had any pressing issues that needed to be dealt with.
- Registration was done online over the summer and leading up to arrival. Housing is notoriously hard to find in Groningen, though they offer some sites to help you. My friends and I booked an Airbnb in February (there weren't many options), so I would start looking right away. We had a dedicated Law student/academic adviser who was helpful. There's a lot of info that will come at you and registration/getting settled in Groningen is a bit bureaucratic, so you need to stay on top of everything.
- The speed and quality of replies to emails was great. I could tell that the student services staff really cared. However, there should have been more transparency about how bad the housing crisis is in Groningen. We were told that it is hard to find housing, but we were not told that thousands of students are homeless.  
There are a lot of moving parts in going on exchange, so make sure that you're staying up to date on the emails with instructions for what to do by when. The communication was fantastic once I was in Groningen. Student support staff are easy to contact and very helpful. Everything went smoothly! Orientation was helpful.
- Astrid the coordinator for incoming exchange students is very friendly and helpful. I would recommend going to her for questions because she was the most helpful and able to point me in the right direction if my question needed to be addressed to someone else. There is a current housing crisis in Groningen which makes it very hard to find housing. Prior to my exchange, the University sent information about housing at SSH housing and so I was able to find accommodations from them.

## Campus Facilities

- While downtown, the campus is concentrated in a small enough area that your classes shouldn't be too far away from each other. The school is very close to a large number of great cafes and restaurants, as well as shopping and the main squares in the downtown area. There is another campus of the school, called Zernike Campus, that is about a 20-minute bike ride from the city-centre. I never had any classes here, but one of my final exams for block 1 was scheduled there, so keep that in mind. The library is large, and I never had trouble finding a spot to study. I did not utilize the school gym, but a couple other students bought student gym memberships at

private gyms in the city. The classrooms are pretty standard; however some do not have power outlets situated by the seats.

- The school is right in the middle of the city so it's super convenient to get to. The main building is a beautiful historic building, and the library is very nice and modern. The school gym membership was weird (you needed to take some sort of fitness test to get one) so everyone used independent gyms - a number of us joined a gym called Springs which was wonderful.
- Gorgeous campus in the city-centre that was intermixed with other buildings. Law school classes were right in the center of the city (inner canal). No gym on campuses, but there are gyms in the city centre (offer 1-week free trial). There are library spaces which get pretty full during exams (people lined up in front at like 7am) so try to live somewhere with a nice study space.
- Excellent apart from the gym being extremely far away from the city - I recommend going to a private gym.
- I did not utilize the library, largely due to COVID. There is a school gym, but it was at a different campus, which was about a 15-minute bike ride from the main campus. I got a gym membership there for a reasonable price. The main campus is easy to navigate. It is conveniently located right in the center of the city, close to bars and restaurants.
- Some of the classes were spread out in buildings across the city. However, they are all pretty easy to access either by walking, biking, or the bus. I had most of my classes in the city centre near the main library. There is also a library in the international law office which is nice, and you can usually find a seat there. All exams were written at the exam building at the Zernike campus.

## Student Accommodation and Food

- I found accommodation and food in the city to be more expensive than in Kingston, but I didn't find that it was an issue saving money while still enjoying the city. My biggest advice would be to find accommodations as early as possible, and make sure you have a strong understanding of where it is located in relation to campus. If you are not comfortable biking to class, find a place that is under a 15-minute walk to the school. I rented a long-term AirBnB with two other Queen's students. It was located a little outside the main ring around the city-centre, in a very nice and quiet residential neighbourhood. We all rented bikes during our exchange, so getting around was not an issue.  
In terms of food, there is a lot of variety in Groningen. There were many types of restaurants (Indonesian, Surinamese, Italian, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, burgers, pizza, etc.). Pricing could be a little expensive, but it wasn't difficult to find more economical options. There are a couple different chain grocery stores with multiple locations in the city: Albert Hein, Coop, and Jumbo were good in terms of selection and pricing. My top restaurant recommendations would be Gustatio, and Italian restaurant that was featured in Michelin magazine (pasta dishes between 12-17 euro) and Warung Jawa (cheap eats Surinamese).

You should also take advantage of the food market that is set up in Vismarkt every week on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. They have a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, cheese, meat, bread, and some stalls make prepared food. I highly recommend trying Kibbeling (fried fish fritters) made fresh from a number of the stalls in the market.

- There is a housing crisis in Groningen so it's essential to **FIND HOUSING EARLY**. This is not a place where you can wait to find accommodation after arriving. I recommend locking something down before the summer starts. A number of apartments were available on Airbnb and many of us found our places that way. The city centre is bordered by a canal, and I recommend finding something no more than a few blocks outside of the canal (we were just outside of it and were within walking distance of everything but just outside the hustle and bustle of the centre, which was nice).

There is an exchange residence (not sure if it's actually affiliated with the school or not) but this was located much farther from the city centre/school and many of the tenants were very young. The Student Hotel is another option which is nice and centrally located, but pricey for what you get. There are tons of food options. There are restaurants and grocery stores everywhere (Jumbo and Albert Heijn are the main ones). Use [Thuisbezorgd.nl](https://www.thuisbezorgd.nl) for food delivery!

- I lived in an amazing, renovated Airbnb off-campus, about a 5-minute bike ride to class (everyone bikes in Groni, so get one too). It was a little more expensive than Kingston rent but was close to a grocery store and all the shops and was seconds outside the inner canal. There are also outdoor markets 3 times a week selling fruits, veg, cheese, meats and fried seafood.
- I lived in SSH residence. My building was Winschoterdiep. It is a 300+ person residence. It was great for meeting people, but if you live in any SSH building then be prepared for lots of noise and parties. I wish that I had looked a bit harder for an apartment, as I probably could have found a place with one or two roommates for about the same rent. My rent was €495,82 eur per month. SSH is not the most responsive or easy to work with organization. It was however very easy to simply choose a room and know that I would have a place to live when I arrived. This was less of a hassle than searching for an apartment whilst in Canada, which was why I decided just to live in a student residence. The rooms themselves were nice! The kitchen and the bathrooms are communal but kept decently clean. If you want hassle-free housing and aren't too picky, then SSH is perfect.



2 - Submitted by Brennan C.

- I lived in a student house owned by SSH housing. It was closer to the Zernike campus but still fairly easy to access the city centre. I would recommend looking for housing right away and be careful of potential scammers. There is a housing crisis in Groningen. It can be very hard to find housing and can be expensive. There is a market in the city centre on Tuesdays and Saturdays. It is nice to go to and buy fresh foods from local vendors.

## Travel to Downtown and Environs

- Everyone in the city bikes everywhere. You can rent a bike from any bike shop or check the incoming exchange students' Facebook page since many students who are finishing an exchange sell their bikes to incoming students. DO NOT buy a bike from someone if they are offering it to you for less than 30 euro...it is most likely a stolen bike. It takes about 15-20 minutes to bike from one end of the city to the other. If you choose to bike, be sure to properly signal your turns and to stay closer to the curb if you intend to bike slowly. Also, it is worth noting that the city has recently begun enforcing the law on not using your cellphone while you ride your bike, even if you're using maps.

Public transit is quite good - there are trains that run like GTA Go Trains and give you access to the rest of the country. It takes about 2-2.5 hours to get to Amsterdam (depending on the number of transfers). I would highly recommend signing up with the Erasmus Students Network (ESN Groningen) - they will send out emails to incoming students in the summer before term starts with more information on how to sign up (see student life section for more info). Through this membership, you get an OV-chipkaart - it's like a Presto card for all of the Netherlands' public transit.

Travelling to other countries was quite easy. I highly recommend downloading the FlixBus app and taking buses rather than flying whenever it is practical to do so, as it saves a ton of money. There is a small airport in Groningen with a limited number of flight options. I would suggest checking websites like SkyScanner or Google Flights to see whether it would be cheaper to fly out of Bremen, Germany (about 2 hours away by FlixBus) than out of Amsterdam.

Depending on the courses you choose, there is ample time to travel outside of the country and still attend class/get your assignments done. With some planning, I was able to travel most weekends.

- Most people get around the city by bike. I didn't purchase one because everything was walkable (it took maybe 20 minutes to walk across the city centre) but was in the minority. I recommend getting an ISIC Ov-Chipkaart as soon as you get there (you can order one online) and use this for the train systems (you get a 15% discount during off-peak times with the card). The card also allows you to rent bikes which you can take on day trips outside of the city. I REALLY recommend doing this because there are some beautiful little towns outside of Groningen and scenic routes getting to them (fields with little sheep, windmills, etc.) One of the only disadvantages of Groningen is that there is no major airport in the city. You have to travel ~2 hours to Amsterdam. The train system is amazing, though - the station is in the middle of the city and takes you directly into the Amsterdam airport. You can also take FlixBus

to the airport for much cheaper. There is a small airport in Groningen that goes to limited number of destinations, for example Mallorca and London. It's easy to get to by public transit. Despite the distance from the airport, we still travelled nearly every weekend - either within the Netherlands (definitely go to Rotterdam and The Hague in addition to Amsterdam!) or internationally. It was a bit of a pain, but not enough to deter us from travelling.

- Bike anywhere within 15 minutes range, the buses aren't that common, and taxis are hard because the inner canal isn't very car friendly. If you sign up for the ISIC mobility card, you get 15% off train/bus fare. Trains are pretty expensive and so are flights from Amsterdam/Bremen, so we used Flixbus a lot to get us places for 1/4th of the price. There's a petting zoo with bb animals near the city that is a must visit! For a day trip, bus up to the north coast (in September when it's still warm) and take a ferry to any of the islands where you can rent bikes and have some yummy seafood. Spend one night in Amsterdam tops (avoid Rotterdam completely) there's way nicer places in Netherlands, and surrounding Europe to see (also don't bother going to Luxembourg). If you need to fly somewhere, also check flights from Bremen, Germany (you can Flixbus there from Groni).
- You will need a bike. Rent a bike from Swapfiets as soon as you get to Groningen, as they will eventually run out once all the international students have arrived. I biked everywhere. I never took public transit except to travel out of the city. Flixbus and Virail are both great methods of transport for travelling around Netherlands and Europe. Virail offers a huge discount if you buy tickets with a group. My favourite cities in the Netherlands were Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Leiden. The Netherlands is great for little weekend trips to different cities. I think exchange can be whatever you make it. Some students were happy to just attend class and focus on school, and other students really cared about being social and going out all the time. It is absolutely possible to attend class and do well in school, but also travel. I would recommend really focusing on school during the week, then using your weekends to travel. Try to schedule your classes so that you have Monday and/or Friday off and can use that extra day as a long weekend. I attended class, got good grades, and travelled to Barcelona, France, Switzerland, Germany, and Belgium.
- Since it is very easy to walk/bike I did not use public transport a lot. I mainly used it when going to other cities. It is easy to book train tickets online to nearby cities in Groningen or other cities such as Belgium, France, Germany, etc. Group tickets on trains are cheaper so if you want to do a group trip with friends then that is a good option. It can also be quite easy to find cheap flights to destinations a little farther away, especially if you only take a carry on.

## City Life Highlights

- Definitely get a European SIM card as soon as you can. I would recommend VodaFone (there are a number of locations in the city). Make sure you get roaming in Europe, so you don't have to buy a new SIM every time you visit a new country. There are a lot of fun pubs/bars in the city centre. I recommend the Drie Gezusters in Groote Markt (main city square) - it's a huge bar with indoor and outdoor seating, and they have heat lamps so you can sit outside well into the

winter.

Groningen is extremely rainy - I highly recommend investing in a proper water-repellant and water-proof raincoat and a good pair of rain boots as it rained almost every day. Temperatures are fairly comparable to Canada. It was pretty warm the first few weeks in September, but it cooled down quickly into fall weather (light jacket, layers, etc.) The end of October and into November-December, it was cold enough that you need a proper winter jacket, as well as gloves (especially if you are biking).

- Cost of living is somewhat expensive - restaurants and rent were pricey (though not as bad as some exchange destinations). Groceries and booze were cheap, though. I had a great phone plan with Lycamobile for much cheaper than what I would get in Canada.  
I had never heard of Groningen before, but I fell totally in love with it. It's a beautiful city that is small in size but incredibly lively - tons of shops, restaurants, and nightlife. Since it's a university city there are many young people, too. From October onward it did rain a fair bit so be prepared for that - it can be a bit of a drag sometimes, but the Dutch totally embrace the rain, people still bike and stroll around outside regardless of the weather. I would choose Groningen all over again if I had the opportunity!
- Groningen is a great student city, it's like a slightly larger European Kingston, with a better nightlife, and probably even more/better restaurants. It's kind of an obscure place too because you'd never pick it to visit off a map so it's really a once in a lifetime experience. Cellphone: Vodafone. Set up an online bank account with N26 so you can get a Maestro card (most places in Groni don't accept visa/MasterCard/debit), or you can just pay with cash in most places.
- Great people, restaurants and bars, cool art scene. NOTE - housing is expensive in Groningen and hard to find; start looking early or organize residence. All 3 of us on exchange lived in residence. If you live in residence, get into the Frascati building - the others are far worse.
- I got a SIM card from Vodafone. Vodafone is located right in the city centre. I paid for unlimited weekly data. They have a really user friendly website too. It is a bit of a bureaucratic nightmare to get your residence permit, so make sure to set up the necessary appointments ASAP. The University will send you steps for how to do it. I got a BUNQ bank account, and it worked perfectly. They are an online bank. The cost of living is very similar to Canada, if not a bit less expensive.
- It is very much a student city, and so a lot of people speak English. However, it never hurts to learn some Dutch. There are a lot of restaurants and cafes that you can try. Also, a lot of options if you are vegan or vegetarian. Forum is a cool place to go to study, watch a movie or see a really nice view of the city. The Netherlands is quite expensive, but it is possible to find cheap options at grocery stores and the local market. Also, Groningen has a lot of thrift stores, usually the ones outside of the city centre tend to be cheaper. I was able to get a Dutch sim card really easily and pay month-to-month.



## Student Life

- Sign up for the ESN Orientation week event - you get a wristband and access to a full orientation week, which is a nice introduction to the city, the campus, and other international students. Through this, you also get an International Student Identity Card (that comes with a lot of great discounts on travel, food, shopping, tourist attractions etc. for all of Europe), and an OV-chipkaart for public transit. When you sign up, you also have the option of renting a bike through their affiliated provider (CheapAss Bikes) - this is what I did but you can absolutely find cheap rentals elsewhere.
- Since law is an undergraduate program in many EU countries, most of the other students were much younger than us so the North American students mostly kept to themselves. There were a lot of Canadian students on exchange there, though, so we still formed a large group of friends. The university hosts an orientation which offers some fun activities and is an opportunity to meet people right off the bat, so I recommend signing up for that.
- There was a fun frosh-style week in late August, so try to fly up for then. It's seemingly impossible to meet actual Dutch students, so mostly met other exchange students which was fun. There will be a lot of Queen's / Western people so if you're not super great at reaching out, you'll always have some Canadians to hang with.
- I did not sign up for ESN (Erasmus Student Network Groningen), but the people who did made friends very quickly! ESN puts on lots of events at the beginning of the semester, and throughout the semester as well. The University didn't let non-European exchange students know about ESN, so by the time I heard about it, tickets had sold out. So, sign up for ESN events! If you live in residence, then you will meet people very easily too. If you take masters level courses, then you will meet local degree program students. Orientation is also a great time to meet people. I met most of my friends through chatting with them in my orientation small groups.



3 - Submitted by Andrea S.

## Additional Comments

- Overall, Groningen was so fun! The city is really cute and much less touristy/crowded than Amsterdam. Everyone was very nice, and almost everyone spoke English. Also, if you like animals, there is a free petting zoo called Kinderboerderij Stadspark! They have cows, chickens, goats, geese, etc.
- Groningen was beautiful, weird, and rainy, but I loved every bit of it. If you schedule your classes right, you have a lot of freedom to travel, I visited 12 countries in just those 4 months.
- I can't even imagine what a massive project it must be to organize the exchange. I am extremely appreciative that Queen's has such an incredible exchange program. It was truly one of the greatest joys of my life. Everything ended up going smoothly.